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January 29, 2020

To: Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
Re: LB 849 – Change eligibility requirements under the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act

Youth who have been involved in our child welfare system deserve access to ongoing support in maintaining safety, well-being, and stability. This is particularly important for young people exiting our child welfare system on the cusp of adulthood who have not found permanency in a lifelong family. The sudden transition from structural supports to complete independence can be a difficult path to navigate safely. Thankfully, Nebraska has an excellent extended foster care program in Bridge to Independence (a.k.a. “Bridge” or “B2I”) to assist young adults in navigating between foster care and independent adulthood. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 849, because it will close a gap for youth aging out of tribal court involvement before our current statutory age of eligibility. Setting the age of eligibility to match the age of majority for each jurisdiction – Nebraska and tribal – will ensure all youth have access to the supports they need as they face adulthood.

I sit on the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee, which is tasked with monitoring the program and making recommendations for improvements. Though I do not represent the Committee in this letter, by my reading, LB 849 resolves the primary recommendation we have made in our 2019 report, approved through the Nebraska Children’s Commission, to extend eligibility for Bridge to native youth aging out of Tribal Court proceedings at the age of majority as defined by the Tribe.¹ The rationale for this recommendation is given in the report on page 7:

... Nebraska tribal territories recognize age of majority at 18. The B2i program enrolls young adults at age 19, the State of Nebraska’s recognized age of majority. The one-year gap for native youth has made locating youth for enrollment particularly challenging and subjected them to a period with no formal support or resources.

I echo this rationale here in support of LB 849. Thank you to Senator Pansing Brooks for being a constant champion for Nebraska’s youth and young adults, and to this Committee for your time and dedication to improving our systems for all children. I would urge you to advance LB 849.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Summers".

¹ Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee. *Annual Report 2018-2019*. Available at: [https://childrens.nebraska.gov/PDFs/Reports/B2I/B2i%20Advisory%20Committee%20Report%20\(Final\)%202019.pdf](https://childrens.nebraska.gov/PDFs/Reports/B2I/B2i%20Advisory%20Committee%20Report%20(Final)%202019.pdf)